s Ready to M

Wednesday is the deadline for flying operations out of privately-owned Grand Central Air Terminal, to make way for industrial expansion. The News-Press sent a reporter-photographer team out to see what the men on the spot were thinking.

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By GEORGE RABORN
News-Press Staff Writer

Doug Peck, 21-year-old Glendale pilot, effortlessly pulled his tiny yellow monoplane through the weeds of Grand Central airport and dropped the rope as he entered the shade of a battered hangar.

"I'll be moving out of here any day now," he muttered. "On the morning of July 16, bulldozers will knock down all this stuff. It's really a shame, too, because there are more planes than ever now. And yet the city has given up this airport. In a few years, they'll probably be trying to buy it back."

Shirtless Robert Lockwood, veteran employe of Grand Central Airport, shook his head and agreed.

"If the Glendale City Council wasn't so lazy, they could save this airport," Lockwood grunted. "It wouldn't cost the city anything. The government has appropriations to cover things like this. But those council officials can't see any farther than the ends of their noses."

Moving To San Fernando

The remaining pilots and instructors stubbornly refused to leave the doomed airstrip, whose two-mile runway of 1937 has been shortened to just 2,800 feet (barely more than a half mile.)

"The city wants a series of small heliports," said Peck. "But the utility of helicopters is too expensive, about $100 a day."

Jack Gajewski, flight instructor with the Glendale School of Aeronautics, lounged in his nearby office. He instructs 75 persons each month and plans to transfer his headquarters to San Fernando Airport as do most of the others, although some will go to Van Nuys and Whitman.

"Rent will be cheaper there," Gajewski admitted. "It'll be only $12 a month plane rent instead of the $25 we pay here. But you can't beat this central location. It makes me sad to leave."

'Only War Could Save It'

Karl Krout, the school's dispatcher, reported that he had heard Burbank was interested in saving Grand Central Airport.

"I wish they would before it's too late," he murmured. "But it's probably too late already. The only thing that could save Grand Central now would be for us to get in a war. We're located in the heart of the city, nearer to downtown Los Angeles than International Airport. And the way the sales of private planes are increasing, Grand Central could really capitalize on this. The bigger airports are all overcrowded now and don't want to fool with private planes. The light aircraft do more flying than all the airlines put together and yet we're getting pushed farther and farther out into the desert.

"If the city was ever attacked, this airport would save us," Krout continued. "We could use these little planes to evacuate people. We can convert them quickly so they can carry four or five persons. But the Glendale brass does not think about this. In fact, they have done little to help this airport. All they have done to improve it since the war was cut the grass."

Grand Central's control tower has been deserted for more than a year, but the airport school's planes don't need it because when the visibility is less than three miles, they are under control of the Burbank tower. The Grand Central tower was abandoned last year after the U.S. Army stopped bringing planes in, and then six months ago the Civil Air Patrol moved away and set up its office in Burbank.

Now all that remains of tradition-enriched Grand Central are weeds, a bumpy asphalt runway, and a few sagging hangars. And they won't be around much longer now.